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IFAS EXTENSION

Friday's Feature

By

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Take care of your caladiums for summer long color

Caladiums provide spectacular color and a tropical feel to the home landscape. Because of their unique foliage, caladiums are strong visual elements in a garden. Whether grown in a container, in beds or as border material, caladiums add color and dimension to the landscape all summer long for very little cost and maintenance.

Unlike a lot of other colorful plants that require full sun, caladiums provide color in shady locations. They thrive under shade trees where it is almost impossible to grow most flowering plants. Since they perform so well in a shady landscape, it is commonly thought that all caladiums require low light to grow well. Some cultivars, however, will perform well in partial to full sun--given enough water.

Caladiums are truly hot weather plants and tend to do well in the hot summers along the Gulf Coast. For maximum enjoyment some extra care is needed during late summer.

Caladiums must be irrigated frequently. If they dry to the wilting point, caladiums may initiate a dormancy phase. Plants may not resume growth, or grow poorly, even after being watered if stressed long enough. Avoid daily waterings however, because constantly wet soils lead to tuber rot. Be sure to mulch the soil around them to help retain moisture.

A moderate level of fertility is needed in order to keep plants vigorous during the summer. Many types of fertilizers can be used including organic materials incorporated prior to planting, granular fertilizers, slow-release fertilizers or liquid fertilizers. Regardless of the form used, a balanced fertilizer is preferred.

Proper fertilization produces healthy, large-leaved plants. When grown in organic soils, spread 1/2 tablespoon of a complete fertilizer around each plant or 1 lb. per 100 square feet of bed area four to six weeks after planting and every two months during the growing season. Plants grown in sandy soils will benefit from monthly applications during the growing season, because fertilizer is rapidly leached from sandy soils.

During the summer, spathes, or pointed flowering stalks, sprout beneath the leaves. Be sure to pinch these off when they appear, as flowering discourages the plant from producing more leaves.

During September or October a remarkable change is seen in caladium plantings, signaling that it is time to dig and store the tubers. Caladiums do not tolerate cold temperatures. When air temperatures drop below 65 degrees F., above ground plant parts will begin to deteriorate and the foliage will eventually collapse. They should be dug before the leaves completely deteriorate since leafless tubers are difficult to locate in the soil.

When the time comes to lift the tubers they should be dug from the soil, cleaned, dried and held in a well ventilated area. Pack the dried tubers in dry peat moss or sand and store them in a well ventilated area where the temperature does not drop below 70 degrees F. or rise above 90 degrees F.

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Caladium tubers will usually begin to sprout after eight weeks in storage. They are ready to plant at this time. However, they should be held in storage and planted in the spring only after soil temperatures rise above 65 degrees F.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>